HONG KONG FILMART

DAY 2

TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2023

VARIETY

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SOURCE: VARIETY READER SURVEY,
HARVEY RESEARCH 2021

DAY 2

VARIETY

HONG KONG FILMART

TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2023

EXCLUSIVE

Prime Video Nabs Mubarak Award-Winner

BY NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

Amazon's Prime Video streaming service has acquired Makbul Mubarak's award-winning debut feature, "Autobiography," for the Southeast Asian region.

The film, which is being sold by Alpha Violet, follows young Rakib (Kevin Ardilova), whose father is in prison and whose brother works abroad. He works as the housekeeper in a mansion in a rural Indonesian town belonging to retired general Purna (Arswendy Bening Swara). Purna returns to the town to start his mayoral election campaign and Rakib, whose clan has worked for the general's family for centuries, serves as his assistant. An act of vandalism during the campaign triggers an escalating chain of violence.

The film debuted in the Venice Film Festival's Horizon's strand in 2022, where it won the FIPRESCI prize and has been on an award-winning spree since, winning at Tokyo, Adelaide, Singapore, Marrakech, Taipei Golden Horse, Stockholm, Bangkok, Hainan and the Asia Pacific Screen Awards. It also had two nominations at the Asian Film Awards in Hong Kong.

From January through March, "Autobiography" has had a theatrical release across Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore.

"I am very glad that 'Autobiography' will be released in a different

PRIME VIDEO CONTINUED P.11

Photo courtesy ABC

Michelle Yeoh gives her acceptance speech after winning the actress Oscar for her role in "Everything Everywhere All at Once" at the Academy Awards Sunday night. It was a big night for Asian represenation, as "Everything Everywhere All at Once" won best pic while Yeoh's co-star Ke Huay Quan at took home an Oscar and "RRR's" song "Naatu Naatu" triumphed.

EXCLUSIVE

'The Witness' Targets Iranian Corruption

BY NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

The writing team of Iran's Jafar Panahi and Nader Saeivar, who won best screenplay at Cannes for "3 Faces" (2018) directed by Panahi, have reunited for "The Witness."

To be directed by Saeivar, the project has been selected for the 21st Hong Kong — Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF), the project market that operates concurrently with FilMart (March 13-16). Saeivar made his feature directing debut with "The Alien" (2020), which was a Berlinale selection and won prizes at the Beijing, Hong Kong, Duhok, Taormina and International Crime and Punishment film festivals.

Saeivar's sophomore feature, "No End," debuted at Busan in 2022 and won him best director at Goa and a brace of awards at Vesoul recently.

"The Witness" follows a widowed retired teacher who sees the murder of her friend. When the police refuse to investigate the murder because of the suspect's status as an important government figure, the witness decides to publicize everything she knows.

Any project with Panahi's involvement is automatically under the microscope of the Iranian regime, given that the filmmaker has been in and out of jail as a political prisoner. Saeivar is used to this, with Panahi also having served as editor and consultant on "No End" and as co-writer and editor on "The Alien."

'THE WITNESS' CONTINUED P.11

HEAR THEM ROAR

Korean Women Fuel TV Series

BY REBECCA SOUW

Whether it's overcoming a mental handicap or fighting for their rights, Korea's women-led stories are evolving as the local industry kicks some of its dated stereotypes for female characters.

Recent shows "The Glory," "Extraordinary Attorney Woo," "Little Women" and "Twenty-Five, Twenty-One" not only delve into social issues in Korea, but highlight the strength and depth of character of their female leads.

Three of these were top-10 shows for Netflix in 2022, while data from FlixPatrol shows revenge thriller "The

WOMEN CONTINUED P.11

EXCLUSIVE

'Remnant' Boosts the Little Guy

BY PATRICK FRATER

Work-in-progress film project "The Remnant" is both a spotlight on those who feel powerless and also a very Hong Kong example of elements of the city pulling themselves up. "The Remnant" is one of the projects in the Hong Kong — Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF), which unspools March 13-15 alongside Hong Kong's FilMart.

"The Remnant" tells the story of a former gangster

'REMNANT' CONTINUED P.11

HAF PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

EXCLUSIVE

Director-Writer Kan Explores Modern 'Marriage' Issues

BY PATRICK FRATER

"We need more love stories, even if they have their ups and downs," says Hong Kong-based producer Cora Yim, who is behind the Hong Kong — Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF) in-development project "The Marriage Drive." Writer-director Lawrence Kan has been kicking around and developing the idea for six years. The story involves a middle-class professional couple — he's in the legal sector, she's in finance — and tracks their childless, but not loveless, marriage over a period of 10 years from marriage to divorce.

Their professions are significant as both jobs bring them to Admiralty, the Hong Kong district that is the seat of the territory's lawmaking, high finance and culture. Admiralty has also been venue for some of the city's most dramatic socio-political twists and turns.

"I'd seen Lawrence's 'When C Goes With G7' and last year watched 'In Geek We Trust,' the TV show that he made in Hong Kong. I was really impressed by its overall quality and depth, but especially by the strength of its dialog. That's a rare thing," says Yim. "So, on the strength of that I sought him out and found out what else he was working on."

"I really liked his treatment for 'The Marriage Drive' and can see how it should be developed and can be delivered without an unrealistic budget," says Yim.

The stated budget is $1.3 million (approximately HK$10 million).

A Vancouver Film School graduate, Kan recently completed his second feature film, "In Broad Daylight," produced by the venerable Derek Yee.

FilMart attendees flooded the floor of the Hong Kong Convention Centre March 13, the event's first day.

Cheyne Gateley/Variety

EXCLUSIVE

Zhang Takes New Route With Drama 'The Walking Bird'

BY PATRICK FRATER

Chinese director Zhang Hanyi takes an unexpected turn with his latest feature film effort, "The Walking Bird," which makes its appearance as an in-development project at the Hong Kong – Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF), which takes place alongside the FilMart rights market.

His previous film, 2017's "Dragonfly Eyes," was one of the most unusual and stylish films of the year from anywhere in the world. It told a disturbing (fictional) narrative through extraordinary found-footage obtained from hundreds of real-world CCTV cameras, and won the FIPRESCI and Ecumenical Jury prizes at the Locarno Festival that year.

While playing in a different register, "The Walking Bird" may be no less sinister.

"The story focuses on a 28-year-old woman who has difficulty handling the changes in her life. She returns to her hometown, faces up to her past and to her family and learns that her grandmother had used a special method to commit a murder. The woman learns the details and takes revenge on her father," Zhang tells *Variety*.

And while Zhang is not prepared at this stage to divulge the gory details, he makes no secret of his inspiration: "Portrait of the Cassowary," a short story by Argentinian writer Julio Cortazar.

Flightless, aggressive and standing two meters tall, with razor-sharp claws, the cassowary has the reputation of being the most dangerous bird in the world. Cortazar describes the cassowary as possessing "suspicious contempt" and "terrifying strength."

"Cortez's language is very evocative and attractive. I was inspired to find out more and, for my research, went to Beijing Zoo where there is a cassowary. Having seen it for real, my story took on a new direction," says Zhang.

"My film is definitely a drama, but with overtones of fantasy. And, where with 'Dragonfly Eyes' I was restricted to the images provided by the surveillance footage, with 'The Walking Bird' I have no such restrictions. I can explore and invent. The production will use mainly handheld cameras and wide shots," he adds.

Ma Xiaotian, who is a lecturer at the Shanxi Film Academy and general coordinator of the Pingyao Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon Film Festival Market, is set at Zhang's producer. She came on board in 2021 at concept stage and has overseen first drafts of the screenplay as well the project's early appearance at the HAF Lab.

"The inputs and guidance from the Lab mentors were helpful to both the writing and for our production plan," Ma says.

The cold wind that has blown through the Chinese film industry over the past few years has especially hurt the independent sector.

"Fewer independent films were able to attract investors, even on small budgets," says Ma. "Now with policy seemingly unlocked and films returning to theaters, we can be hopeful of change. We have raised half of the production finance already and will attend HAF in the hope of raising the remainder, ahead of a planned shoot in August in Ningbo."

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congratulates

Udine Far East Film Festival
on your 25th anniversary.

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Far East Mines the Past

Festival dedicated to Asian films marks 25th anniversary with 1980s pics and new industry initiatives ● *By Patrick Frater*

↑ Audiences gather for a screening at the Far East Film Festival in 2022.

Photo courtesy of Udine Far East Film Festival

The Far East Film Festival in Udine, Italy, is back in full force in 2023, celebrating its 25th anniversary edition from April 21–29.

A key component of the celebrations will be a focus on the Asian films of the 1980s. "We have never programmed these films, nor put together this kind of program before," says Thomas Bertacche, the FEFF's co-head. "But these were the films and directors that inspired us to shape Udine into the festival that it is today."

Pitching the historical lineup as "hidden treasures," the selection is expected to include early works by Japan's Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Thailand's Nonzee Nimibutr and South Korea's Jan Sung-woo.

Roger Garcia, former executive director of the Hong Kong International Film Festival, is set to curate a section on Leung Po-chi, the 83-year-old British-Hong Kong director who made the leap from commercials to TV and into film. Leung was at the forefront of Hong Kong cinema's "golden era" making diverse films, including 1984's "Banana Cop" and Chow Yun-fat-starrer "Hong Kong 1941."

Most of the rest of the festival lineup has yet to be announced, though organizers have teased the selection of "The Sales Girl," a Mongolian comedy by Sengedorj Janchivdorj in which a woman finds herself working in a shop selling sex toys.

"While seeming on the surface to examine the private kinks and vices of Ulan Bator, it actually follows [the woman's] progressive emancipation from her ambitious family. It's not her bizarre experiences in the sex shop that help her blossom, it's her relationship with its mysterious and worldly middle-aged owner," explains Sabrina Baracetti, the FEFF's other co-head.

Udine can point to "Karmalink" by Jake Wachtel, which was selected in 2018 for Udine and premiered at Venice Critics' Week in 2021, and to "Plan 75" by Japan's Chie Hayakawa among its past success stories. "Plan 75" took part in the 2019 Focus Asia edition and premiered as a completed film at Cannes' Un Certain Regard in 2022. (Building on that success, FEFF will bestow a lifetime achievement award to "Plan 75" lead Baisho Chieko.)

Having long ago established itself as one of the world's premiere festivals specializing in Asian genre film, it has in recent years made strides in establishing additional credentials as an industry-support program.

Nestled close to the Alps, the FEFF had little choice other than to become a destination festival — where films and filmmakers were obliged to make a purposeful decision to participate.

That quality has helped Udine lock in participants for its All Genres Project Market, the Ties That Bind workshop program, which connects professionals from Asia and Europe, and its FEFF Campus journalist training program.

This year the Focus Asia industry package is to be swelled by the participation of the Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA), which will launch a cash prize of €10,000 ($11,000) for the best project at the market.

The move is in line with TAICCA's strategy of reaching out to select events that can boost film co-production on the island.

"The first year of collaboration with TAICCA in 2022 was a success. We learned more about Taiwan, its culture and its movie industry. For the second year, our aim is to create a stronger bridge between Taiwan and Europe by exchanging our cultures and our markets," says Baracetti.

Other film support agencies from Asia — notably the Film Development Council of the Philippines, Malaysia's MIFFEST and the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office — are poised to follow suit and tap into Udine's 25-year hot streak.

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WINNERS

‘Drive My Car’ Tops Asian Film Awards

BY PATRICK FRATER AND NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

The Asian Film Awards returned to Hong Kong with a fanfare on Sunday night with the much-decorated 2021 Japanese drama “Drive My Car” named the best film, defeating hot favorite “Decision to Leave,” which had opened its campaign with 10 nominations.

Other notable awards went to Japan’s Hirokazu Kore-eda, whose “Broker” debuted at Cannes last year, but which was largely shunned in his home country.

“Decision to Leave” was nevertheless rewarded with three awards, best screenplay, best production design and best actress for China’s Tang Wei.

While nominations were geographically diverse, the awards excluded films from India, Indonesia and the Philippines, all of which had made strong claims for recognition at other festivals and awards events.

The AFA awards jury was headed by China’s Zhang Yimou.

Sunday snubs included Indonesia’s “Autobiography” and Happy Salma (“Before, Now & Then”), both of which have been widely lauded on the festival circuit.

After detours to Macau and Busan and a COVID hiatus in previous years, the award ceremony was held at the sparkling new Palace Museum in Hong Kong’s West Kowloon Cultural District.

Director Hirokazu Kore-eda signs autographs after his “Broker” win, left; Tony Leung Chui Wai with his two awards.

As a result, proceedings took on a very Hong Kong flavor in terms of presenters and special prize winners. Reclusive star Carina Lau even got to present the best actor award to her real-life husband, superstar Tony Leung Chiu-wai.

Mabel Cheung, director of the controversial documentary “To My Nineteen-Year-Old Self,” received a rousing cheer as she took the stage as presenter with veteran martial arts choreographer Yuen Woo Ping. They handed the lifetime achievement award to another Hong Konger, veteran martial artist Sammo Hung. He thanked Hong Kong audiences for continuing to support local films.

The evening’s first prize-winner was especially popular, going to local Hong Kong breakthrough performer Mak Pui-tun in “The Sparring Partner.” In an emotional and barely controlled speech, he thanked the producer and director for not having watched his previous films before casting him.

The presentations avoided almost all mentions of politics and glossed over potential controversies. Instead, it focused on happy reunions, Asian filmmaking solidarity and reminiscences about hard times past.

Outside, crowds were unusually large, numbering in their hundreds in the humid evening air, with fandom swelled by the attendance of four members of Hong Kong boy band sensation Mirror.

Filmmaker and industry attendance was also robust. Those spotted on the red carpet and pre-event cocktails included not only presenters and nominess, but also such names as Lee Yong-Kwan, chairman of the Busan International Film Festival; Ando Hiroyasu, chairman of the HKIFF; Davy Chou, director of “Return to Seoul”; Wilfred Wong, head of the Hong Kong International Film festival Society; Sabrina Baracetti and Thomas Bertacche, co-heads of the Festival of Far Eastern Film in Udine; Keiko Dan, producer and festival programmer from Japan; Kiki Fung, festival programmer; Shan Dongbing, Chinese producer; Feng-I Fiona Roan, Taiwanese director of “American Girl”; Janet Wu, director of the Wu Tianming Film Foundation; Ivy Ho, producer; director and producer Anthony Chen; directors Lav Diaz, Makbul Mubarak and Mohsen Tanabandeh; and “Joyland” producer Apoorva Guru Charan.

COMPLETE WINNERS LIST

- Film **“Drive My Car”** by Hamaguchi Ryusuke (Japan)
- Director **Kore-eda Hirokazu** for “Broker” (Korea)
- Actress **Tang Wei** for “Decision to Leave” (Korea)
- Actor **Tony Leung Chiu Wai** for “Where the Wind Blows” (Hong Kong)
- Supporting Actress **Kim So-jin** for “Emergency Declaration” (Korea)
- Supporting Actor **Miyazawa Hio** for “Egoist” (Japan)
- New Director **Jigme Trinley** for “One and Four” (China)
- Newcomer **Mak Pui Tung** for “The Sparring Partner” (Hong Kong)
- Screenplay **Chung Seo-kyung, Park Chan-wook** for “Decision to Leave” (Korea)
- Editing **Yamazaki Azusa** for “Drive My Car” (Japan)
- Cinematography **Lu Songye** for “One and Four” (China)
- Original Music Ishibashi Eiko for “Drive My Car” (Japan)
- Costume Design Karen Yip, Dora Ng for “Anita” (Hong Kong)
- Production Design **Ryu Seong-hie** for “Decision to Leave” (Korea)
- Visual Effects **Chas Chau, Leung Wai Kit, Kwok Tai** for “Warriors of Future” (Hong Kong)
- Sound **Tu Duu-Chih** for “Anita” (Hong Kong)
- Next Generation Award **Ji Chang-wook** (Korea)
- AFA X STI Best Dressed Award **Abe Hiroshi**
- Asian Film Contribution Award **Tony Leung**
- Lifetime Achievement Award **Sammo Hung**

Photos: Anthony Kwan/Getty Images

REGIONAL OUTLOOK

Panel Probes 'Asian Wave,' Co-Prods and What Travels Well

BY NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

Asian content heavyweights revealed their thoughts on several subjects at a panel called "The Asian Wave in 2023 and Beyond" on March 13, the opening day of FilMart.

The lively session, moderated by *Variety*'s Asia editor Patrick Frater, featured Sebastian Kim, director of international content sales and acquisition at Korea's CJ ENM, Sanmesh Thakur, executive VP and territory head, Asia Pacific, at India's Zee Entertainment Enterprises and Ziraviss Vindhanapisuth, VP, international business at Thailand's BEC World Public Company.

The evergreen topic of co-production was discussed in some depth. Kim said: "We've been looking for this formula for decades and for now, we find that the best formula of co-production is more like an adaptation of the original — A place to B place production — that's how we've been doing it."

Kim, noted, however, that mixed casting from different countries don't work because of a lack of market focus. "Thai actors are for the Thai market and Korean actors are for the Korean market, when you mix it together, then it becomes like a nowhere target market," Kim said. "I have not seen a great success of mixed casting working within Asia."

Vindhanapisuth said that the key to solving the mixed casting conundrum is to develop language and chemistry between casts and that producers have to be clear in which language the program should be made.

Panel moderator Patrick Frater, left, with participants Sebastian Kim, Sanmesh Thakur and Ziraviss Vindhanapisuth

Thakur added that Zee is already active in the co-production space with projects in the Middle East and Africa. "Produce locally for the local people in their local language," Thakur said. "But in doing so, you need to be very attuned to the cultural nuances of a particular region.

"India as a country has the historical and cultural connection to a lot of the Southeast Asian countries and that becomes a very good storyline to work on trying to mix places, countries and actors," Thakur added.

Kim, Thakur and Vindhanapisuth presented sizzle reels from their respective companies, and the Zee executive pointed out that the common genres across the presentations were horror, drama, love and action.

Of these genres, drama travels the best across Asia and internationally, Vindhanapisuth said.

"The biggest strength of Asian drama is inviting the emotional response from the consumers. And when a drama can resonate with consumers' emotional feelings, that's when the consumer really falls in love with drama," Thakur said.

"The biggest strength of Asian drama is inviting the emotional response from the consumers."

ZIRAVISS VINDHANAPISUTH

Photo: Naman Ramachandran/Variety

EXCLUSIVE

Mocha Chai, Emissary Ink Partnership

BY PATRICK FRATER

Singapore's Mocha Chai Laboratories and Emissary Pictures, a company that straddles New Zealand, Australia and Indonesia, have announced a strategic partnership for the development and production of cross-cultural films, series and content.

The venture will have offices in all four countries and will identify, develop and produce content across genres and formats, including films, television series, documentaries and digital content.

Mocha Chai and Emissary Pictures say that they have scripted and unscripted projects in development and production.

Slate details, however, remain under wraps as do distribution plans.

"We are excited to partner with Emissary Pictures and join forces to combine our unique capabilities in storytelling and world-class post-production," says Mocha Chai producer Michelle Chang. "We have the support of Singapore Film Commission and major partners in the region."

Emissary Pictures creative chief Joseph Taylor says: "As a writer, director and actor, authenticity is paramount. We are thrilled to partner with Mocha Chai Laboratories to work with local talent to bring incredible stories to international audiences."

Adds director and Mocha Chai co-founder Chai Yee Wei, "Over the past 10 years, we have built a world-class post-production facility in Singapore. With this alliance, we are excited to widen our reach."

The 1992 actioner "Supercop," (aka "Police Story III"), starred Michelle Yeoh.

Courtesy Everett Collection

KICKING DOWN BARRIERS

Female Action Heroes Born on Hong Kong Screens

BY VIVIENNE CHOW

The Oscars on Sunday night finally bestowed the long overdue honor on Michelle Yeoh, who is known for her versatile acting and superhuman abilities to kick butt on the big screen. But long before the Malaysian actor grabbed the Hollywood spotlight, she was an established action heroine in a series of Hong Kong films representing a key chapter of the city's cinema history that smashed gender stereotypes.

In fact, those who grew up with Hong Kong literature and cinema are familiar with female fighters. Heroic women who are skillful martial artists are depicted in wuxia novels, which exploded in popularity in the mid-20th century.

Martial arts films were also in fashion at the time, and while most of them revolve around male leads, some titles gave rise to female action stars. Cheng Pei-pei, the star of King Hu's "Come Drink With Me" (1966) and later joined Yeoh in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (2000), might be the most well-known female action star from this period, but to the local audience, Yu So-chow is the pioneer.

Trained as a Peking Opera performer, Yu appeared in a staggering 170 wuxia films throughout her decades-long career that began in 1948. Her most notable works include "Burning of the Red Lotus Monastery" part one and two (1950), and the four-part feature "Buddha's Palm" (1964).

Hong Kong action films were dominated in the 1960s and 1970s by male stars. Bruce Lee was the international breakout, and he set the stage for Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Corey Yuen and others who were trained by Yu's father, Yu Jim-yuen, the legendary martial artist and actor who ran a Peking Opera school in Hong Kong.

Fast-forward to the 1980s, as Hong Kong entered a new golden era of economic prosperity and cultural diversity. The surging demand for entertainment propelled filmmakers to be creative. Hung and Yuen teamed up in 1985 for action drama "Yes, Madam."

The film starred Yeoh (her first major leading role) and American martial artist Cynthia Rothrock as two women inspectors who are also skilled fighters. A refreshing take on the traditionally male-dominated crime thriller genre, "Yes, Madam" was characterized by memorable fight scenes in which the two leading ladies performed their own stunts.

The popularity of "Yes, Madam" was quickly followed by "Royal Warriors" (1986), also starring Yeoh as a police officer, and several other installments collectively known as "In the Line of Duty" series as a girls-with-guns subgenre.

It also inspired the Chan-produced action-comedy series "The Inspector Wears Skirts," which hit the screen in the late 1980s, starring female action star Sibelle Hu. Rothrock also appeared in this series as a tough Interpol inspector, fighting alongside the young Kara Wai, who began acting in Shaw brothers' wuxia films in late '70s when she was still a teenager.

The combination of comedy, glorious action choreography and the skill of the women fighting against the bad guys made these films wildly popular and are still fondly remembered today.

WOMEN CONTINUED FROM P. 1

Glory" as the number one TV show on the streamer this year in South Korea, as of Feb. 24.

While Korea's rigidly hierarchical society and history has traditionally put women at the bottom of society, that same rigidity moulded strong, creative women who overcame hardship and prejudice. Finally, these traits are being reflected in content hitting the small screen.

"Women were underrepresented and had to be more competitive in getting what they want," adds Kang Eun K, the "Doctor Romantic" screenwriter who is now preparing the thriller action series "Gyeongseong Creature" for Netflix.

Stories of women overcoming obstacles are hardly new. However, today, women make up a large and successful portion of the screenwriters working in Korean TV. And, with success flowing faster in the streaming era, the narrative is evolving.

"My [predecessors] wrote dramas, films and songs about women. There was a spirit of resistance because there were definite barriers at that time. But now, we focus more on freedom and the identity one holds, be it [about] men or women," says Kang.

In the Netflix original film "Kill Boksoon," which will be released at the end of March, Jeon Do-yeon gets to defy multiple stereotypes. Her character endures all the usual workplace hassles in a company that happens to be in the assassination business. She juggles as a single mother to a stroppy teen, and even manages to upend another trope by being funny.

Says Moon: "Nowadays, scriptwriters and directors ask, 'What do you think about this female character, from a woman's perspective?' or 'Would this be offensive to a female audience?' This [level of] consideration was never given before. This is a very encouraging change."

"Autobiography" wowed festival audiences around the world.

PRIME VIDEO CONTINUED FROM P.1

platform, [on] such a massive outlet as Prime Video, therefore reaching different clusters of audiences, and will hopefully spark new discussions. ... I am so grateful to live in an era where there are so many ways of reaching the audiences," Mubarak says.

"Autobiography" is produced by KawanKawan Media, led by Indonesian producer Yulia Evina Bhara.

"A release such as the release of 'Autobiography' on Prime Video is a good momentum for an Indonesian film to be seen by the wider public in Southeast Asia. I am convinced that the collaborations between filmmakers of Southeast Asian nations will flourish even more in the future," Bhara says.

'REMNANT' CONTINUED FROM P. 1

who, upon his release from prison, sets up a laundry in an anonymous district and lives a quiet life. After property developers try to grab a rundown building, young gangsters try to throw people out of the building and drug addicts cause trouble, the old-timer heeds his neighbors' calls and fights back.

Director Kwan Man-hin (AKA Mandrew) developed the fiction narrative feature from a documentary he made about a former Triad member who became a well-respected restaurateur in Hong Kong. His business was forced to close in 2016 when the area succumbed to developers' bulldozers.

"People feel so helpless against the development of Hong Kong," says producer Ding Yuin-shan.

Opportunity emerged from the depths of the COVID pandemic. The Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers, a consortium of nine film industry guilds, announced its "Keep Rolling" initiative, which would substantially finance a handful of indie projects. "The Remnant" was one of two selected in the 2021 first round and was able to shoot last year.

Director Kwan Man-hin is at HAF with "The Remnant."

Kwan and Ding's attendance at HAF will be focused less on completing the $100,000 budget and more on making the right attachments. "I want people to get to know [Kwan] and get festivals interested in him," says Ding. The Federation is fielding rights enquiries.

Kwan's film is very much a product of its time — not only its focus on the struggle between the little guy and the powerful property sector but also the way it portrays the resilience and adaptability of the people of Hong Kong.

'THE WITNESS' CONTINUED FROM P.1

"That's underground cinema, we have to find a way of doing it," Saeivar says. He recounts anecdotes of shooting on location in Iran with lookouts posted and hiding in cars when the police pass by. "It's always like this and we are habituated to it," Saeivar adds.

In September 2022, a wave of protests were sparked in Iran by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while she was held in custody for allegedly wearing a loose hijab. Saeivar was one of those who participated in the protests.

"I wish for revolution in Iran," Saeivar says, adding that he is not afraid of being targeted. "Living in Iran is like living in jail. You go home or you go to prison, there is no difference. We are living for today."

"The Witness" also reunites Saeivar with his "No End" producer Said Nur Akkus, who will produce via his German-Turkish production company ArtHood Films. The project, to be made in the Farsi and Azerbaijani languages, has a total budget of $332,000 and has secured $47,600 so far.

"After our collaboration on 'No End,' we knew that we wanted to work together again on another project. In terms of the content, Nader's new film 'The Witness' makes another strong and important statement, not without some personal risk, of course. His spirit of political resistance and continuous efforts to share the truth with international audiences is something that I deeply admire and wish to support. Though the story is set specifically within Iranian society, I believe that all audiences will find the film relevant as it touches on topics of domestic violence and class hierarchies. The strong female protagonist gives viewers a fresh perspective on the struggles of women in a patriarchal society, an issue that could not be more relevant today in light of the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in Iran that began in recent months," Akkus says.

"On a filmmaking level, we have a script written by Iranian dream team Jafar Panahi and Nader Saeivar," Akkus adds.

"At FilMart we are hoping on one hand to find financial partners such as investors or co-producers to close the financing, since we are planning to begin shooting in late summer. On the other hand, we are already on the lookout for distributors for pre-sales," Akkus concludes.

Love Stories Wanted: Hype behind Dating and Romance Reality Show

Time : 17:00 – 18:00
Co-organiser : ContentAsia
Language : English (supported by simultaneous interpretation in Putonghua)
Venue : Starlight Theatre
Speakers :

Yosuke Muramoto
Director and Chief Producer, YD Creation & Yoshimoto Kogyo Co., Ltd.

Linfield Ng
Vice President, Format Sales and Production, Asia, NBCUniversal Formats

Natakrit Wannapinyo
Chief Operating Officer, TV Thunder Public Company Limited

Moderator :

Janine Stein
Editorial Director, ContentAsia

Linmon Pictures 2023-2024 Lineup

Time : 10:00 – 11:00
Organiser : Shanghai Linmon Pictures Co., Ltd.
Language : Putonghua (supported by simultaneous interpretation in English)
Venue : Galaxy Theatre

Chinese Content Global Communication

Time : 10:00 – 12:00
Organiser : - International Cooperation Department of National Radio and Television Administration of China
- Radio and Television Administration of Zhejiang
- China (Zhejiang) International Cooperation Zone for Film and TV Industry and Phoenix TV
Language : Putonghua (supported by simultaneous interpretation in English)
Venue : Starlight Theatre

EMP Press Conference (by invitation only)

Time : 11:30 – 14:30
Organiser : Emperor Motion Pictures
Venue : Galaxy Theatre

Introducing "Tumsi" ; A Short Drama About Hokkaido Ainu People

Time : 14:00 – 15:00
Organiser : The Sapporo Television Broadcasting Co,. Ltd
Venue : Starlight Theatre

Global Film & TV Investment Summit: Reconnecting Hong Kong with the World

Time : 15:00 – 16:00
Organiser : Phoenix Waters Productions
Venue : Galaxy Theatre

MUSE Communication Anime Release Conference

Time : 15:30 – 16:30
Organiser : Muse Communication (H.K.) Ltd
Venue : Starlight Theatre

Chapter One of Our Passionate Movie Journey

Time : 16:30 – 17:30
Organiser : Vplus Studio Corporation Limited
Venue : Galaxy Theatre

Conferences & Special Events